

The SOUTHERN TRAIL

Santa Fe to San Diego & Los Angeles

1846-1862

CALIFORNIA

Rancho Santa Ana del Chino

Isaac Williams, grantee of the Rancho Santa Ana del Chino, dispensed aid to thousands of impoverished and ragged travelers. He was the second person off the Southern Trail to become a permanent resident of California in 1832.

Warner's Ranch

Jonathan Warner crossed the Colorado in 1831 thus becoming the first permanent resident to arrive in California off of the Southern Trail.

Independence Rock

Christened by Kit Carson in 1846, this bluff contains names, initials, and dates of well-known 19th century travelers carved into the desert varnish that covers the dark basaltic boulders.

New River

June, 1849
Unusually high floods in the Colorado River caused this dry wash to unexpectedly fill with flowing water, to the great relief of parched travelers.

Yuma Crossing

Virtually all early travelers on the southern trail swam, forded, or ferried across the Colorado River here, near the mouth of the Gila.

The Oatman Massacre

August 18, 1851

Here Royce Oatman his family were attacked by Indians. One son and two daughters survived the massacre. The two girls were carried into captivity by the Indians.

Pima Villages

The Pima Indians (Akimel O'odham) were unfailingly friendly and helpful to American emigrants.

Battle of the Bulls

December 11, 1846

The Mormon Battalion was attacked by a herd of wild bulls here, injuring several men and animals. The cattle were descended from those left behind when the San Bernardino Rancho was abandoned in the 1830s.

Graham's Road 1848 / Cooke's Road 1846

Colonel Philip St. George Cooke and the Mormon Battalion followed the San Pedro River toward Tucson in 1846, but Major Lawrence P. Graham opted for a different route along the Santa Cruz in 1848. Graham's road became the preferred trail for emigrants.

This map depicts the Southern Trail to California as forged by the Army of the West in 1846. This trail to victory in the Mexican-American War resulted in New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, and California becoming part of the United States. No sooner were the cannons silenced than gold was discovered in California setting off the now famous Gold Rush of '49, bringing a flood of travelers to the Southern Trail and the northern trails alike.

The great overland migration on northern trails began in the 1840s and became one of the best documented events in American history. Thousands from east coast states plodded northern trails to Oregon and California. Less known were historic events and emigration of thousands of goldrushers and settlers over what is known as the Southern Trail. These emigrants came mainly from southern states, thus making the move west a truly national experience.

California held other treasures of much greater long-term value in its rich agricultural lands, favorable climate, abundant water, and many opportunities free for the taking. This road, blazed by Col. Cooke and his Mormon Battalion, the first wagon road from the United States to the Pacific Ocean, soon became the major route from the southern states and northern Mexico for multitudes of emigrants eager for a new life in this land of opportunity.

Socorro

Dominated by its San Miguel Mission, this very old Mexican town provided a place where emigrants could resupply and occasionally enjoy a lively fandango.

Disappointment Creek

Today known as Ranch Creek, Lt. Emory named this place in 1846 after failing to get fresh mules from the local Indians.

Alamocitos (small cottonwoods)

The Gila River pack trail split off just beyond Alamocitos. In recent times this place was called "Hot Springs," until its citizens changed the name to "Truth or Consequences" after a 1950s television show.

Guadalupe Pass

This rugged pass tested emigrants' strength and endurance. Its use later declined as an emigrant trail and it became a haven for rustlers and robbers.

ARIZONA

NEW MEXICO

TEXAS

MEXICO

0 20 40 60 80 100
MILES

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